1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
ON6 Buka ON6
Kurtatchi

INTRODUCTION

101 131 THE people whose lives are described in this book are the Melanesian inhabitants of the island of Buka and of the north coast of the island of Bougainville, separated by the narrow strip of turbulent water known as Buka Passage. These two, the most north-westerly of the Solomon Islands, have since 1920 formed part of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. The locality was chosen as likely to afford me an opportunity of studying native life under relatively primitive conditions.

114 177 On September 28, 1929, I began work at Petats, a coral islet off the west coast of Buka, which had been recommended as a suitable starting-point for my inquiry. I soon realized, however, that the people of Buka as a whole, and of Petats in particular, had already come under the influence of the white man to such an extent that much of their original mode of life had disappeared. As they [98] 18 themselves put it, speaking in pidgin-English: 'White man he capsize altogether something belong before.' It is true that the investigation of an erstwhile savage society is a most important part of present-day anthropology, but I had been instructed to study a primitive community. A journey round Buka proved that little was to be gained by moving to any of the villages there. Meanwhile, I had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Hadden, the daughter of the anthropologist R. Parkinson, author of *Dreissig Jahre in der Südsee*. At her suggestion I accepted an invitation from Pinari, the local headman, to come and stay at Kurtatchi, a village on the north coast of Bougainville, about ten miles east of Buka Passage. After a preliminary visit, I settled there on January 1, 1930. Owing partly to its being less easily accessible, and partly to the conservatism of its people, I found at Kurtatchi conditions approximating somewhat more closely to what they had been before the coming of the white man, though, as will be evident from my report, far from being unchanged. The bulk of my information was obtained at this village, which was my home for nine months; the villages of Tabut and Ruri, on either side of it, providing valuable additional and corroborative data.

114 The following somewhat personal notes on the manner in which I lived and worked are given in order to make quite clear the

1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
ON6 Buka ON6
Kurtatchi

methods of hunting, fishing, and gardening, &c., as well as consolidating my position and getting to know them more intimately. That they accepted me as a member of the community they showed when, on my return from a journey, they performed the appropriate ceremony for me as they would for one of themselves under like circumstances, and clinched it by saying: 'Now you really belong to us.' I received invitations from the people of several other villages to come and live with them. This was, of course, impossible in the time at my disposal, but whenever I paid them a short visit I was always received most hospitably.

In working among the women I took all the advantage I could of my sex, and although I found them less articulate than the men, they were, I feel sure, on much more intimate terms with me than they would have been with a man, besides admitting me to their huts during parturition, when all males are excluded. Among the men, however, it became a recognized convention to ignore the fact that I was a woman, and I was allowed to learn their secrets and to handle objects, such as the bull-roarer and the stone fish used in bonito magic, which are kept from sight and knowledge of their own womenfolk. Although I was careful to deserve their confidence, I do not think this prejudiced my position among the women at all, since it was understood that it was part of my work to know about the men as well as about themselves.

I often accompanied my native friends on their journeys and thus became acquainted with the greater part of Buka and its associated islets, the whole length of the north coast of Bougainville, and portions of the mountainous hinterland. Between the inhabitants of Buka and those of the north coast of Bougainville there is at the present time, and probably always has been, close social contact, including frequent intermarriage. As will be seen in the chapters that follow, the structure of their society, their clans and their kinship system, are fundamentally the same, and allowing for local variations, there seems sufficient resemblance to indicate that this whole area may be considered as a cultural unit. It extends down the east coast of Bougainville as far as Numanuma, and down the west coast for a shorter distance, the limits of which I was unable to determine exactly. The Hahon people (Wawon in the Kurtatchi dialect, which has no *h* sound) inhabiting the foothills behind the northern shore do not intermarry with the coast people, with perhaps some rare exceptions, and in their intercourse

1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
ON6 Buka ON6
Kurtatchi

there still remain traces of the hostility that formerly prevailed. There would appear to be some affinity, both in language and in culture, between these two groups, but the slight amount of contact I had with the Hahon people was insufficient to enable me to classify them exactly. The Kunua people, inhabiting the north-central highlands and a portion of the coast about twenty miles south of its north-western corner, differ so much, both in customs and in language, from the people among whom I lived, that even a short visit was enough to indicate that they should probably be considered as a separate cultural entity. The coast folk are still very much afraid of the Kunua people, though there is no longer open warfare between them. They meet but rarely, chiefly on ceremonial occasions, such as those connected with the adolescent boys. These meetings are always characterized by a noticeable feeling of tension.

This book is primarily concerned with the people of the north coast of Bougainville, particularly its western half. With certain exceptions, discussed in their appropriate context, most of the information here given also holds good of the people of Buka, except in so far as changes have been introduced there by contact with whites. Since there are local differences, not due to white influence, I have been careful to give, in all cases, the exact locality from which each piece of information was obtained. Data concerning the provenance of which nothing is said, were collected at Kurtatchi from inhabitants of that village.

The culture of these people is disappearing with increasing rapidity, and their ideas on every subject are being changed day by day through contact with those of our own civilization. It therefore seemed imperative to make my investigation cover as much of their lives as possible. Though the information I have gathered is necessarily affected by the limitations imposed both by time and by my personal predilections and training, I have tried to put on record the most outstanding features of a *modus vivendi* which will, for better or for worse, in a very short time have been altered beyond recognition or recall.

[p. xxiv is blank]